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RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 9593  
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 0562  
RUEHCI/AMCONSUL KOLKATA PRIORITY 1214  
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RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 DHAKA 000341

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DEPT FOR SCA/FO, SCA/PB, DRL/FO

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TAGS: [MASS](#) [PHUM](#) [PINR](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [BG](#)

SUBJECT: BANGLADESH'S RAPID ACTION BATTALION RESPONDS  
POSITIVELY TO HUMAN RIGHTS TRAINING

REF: 2007 DHAKA 1602

Classified By: CDA a.i. Geeta Pasi. Reason: 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Senior members of Bangladesh's Rapid Action Battalion (RAB) said they highly valued a just-concluded human rights course and were eager for more such training. The United Kingdom-administered training has the potential to quickly improve the paramilitary forces' human rights performance via changes to procedures on custody, interrogation and internal training. The two-week course barely scratched the surface of needed training, however, and there are a number of ways the USG could further improve the battalion's human-rights record and counterterrorism capabilities. An assessment on how to structure such training should be a first step should a USG decision to engage the RAB be forthcoming. End Summary.

¶2. (SBU) Although the RAB is Bangladesh's premier law enforcement and counterterrorism force, the USG and other Western nations and organizations have been reluctant to engage it because of its historically poor, but improving, human rights record. From March 2-13, the U.K. trained about two dozen senior RAB members on human rights theory and procedures. A representative each from the British Army Legal Service and the British National Police Improvements Agency taught the course, which was attended primarily by adjutants and warrant officers from each of the RAB's 12 battalions. EmbOffs visited the training at RAB headquarters -- held in a conference room festooned with human rights-related quotes from the likes of former U.S. Chief Justice Earl Warren, 18th Century political philosopher Edmund Burke and academic Noam Chomsky -- on the penultimate day of training, when participants were preparing a report of suggested changes to improve the group's human rights practices. The trainers praised the students for their attentiveness and enthusiasm, and discussions between EmbOffs and four of the participants indicated they took the subject matter seriously.

¶3. (SBU) Among the procedural changes suggested by the trainees to improve RAB's human rights performance was the creation of custody officers who would be responsible for the proper treatment of apprehended suspects. They also wanted to change interrogation procedures by adding a second interrogator and by possibly videotaping the proceedings. Participants also said they were formulating a training program on human rights theory and practice to deliver at the individual battalion level. They also recommended exploring

how to expand non-lethal use-of-force options. (Note: The Department of Defense Office of Defense Cooperation is planning a Non-Lethal Exercise Seminar in July for Bangladeshi security forces other than the RAB that will include training on the use of non-lethal weapons and on how to organize non-lethal approaches to law enforcement. End Note)

14. (C) Although the British High Commission was not immediately prepared to discuss its plans for future RAB training, clearly there are many opportunities for the U.S., the U.K. and other nations to provide training to further improve human rights performance and counterterrorism capabilities. The British trainers, for example, pointed to the need for a transparent system of personal accountability in dealing with accusations of gross violations of human rights by RAB members. (Note: Additional Director General Col Gulzer Uddin Ahmed told EmbOffs that since its inception in 2004 the 10,000-member force has dismissed 30-35 people for abuse of power. Another senior RAB official responsible for investigations of shootings that resulted in deaths said he could not recall any that had been forwarded by local magistrates for further judicial action. End Note.) When asked during the training to name the RAB's weaknesses, participants listed the lack of modern police training, of manpower and of foreign training. Additional Director General Gulzer said that RAB needed training to improve capacity building, interrogation techniques, cyber-crime investigations and intelligence collection.

15. (C) Conclusion: The two-week British course, coming on the heels of reports that extrajudicial killings by the RAB have declined dramatically (Reftel), is the latest sign that it is

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paying more than lip service to improving its human rights record. These positive developments have come under the non-partisan Caretaker Government and should be reinforced and expanded during the remainder of the time it is in office, namely until the end of 2008. Many RAB members are newly arrived from their parent police and military units -- the four trainees met by EmbOffs all had joined within the past year -- which distances them from the paramilitary force's early excesses and may make them more receptive to human-rights training. Embassy Dhaka supports USG engagement with RAB to allow training to improve human rights performance and counterterrorism capabilities. Given the current RAB and government leadership support for these goals, an assessment on putting an effective USG-sponsored training program in place should commence immediately should the USG decide to engage the RAB.  
Pasi